

March 8, 2022

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Cheryl Michaud, and until my retirement in October, I was an employee of Stop and Shop Supermarkets. I am here to speak in favor of Raised Bill 317, AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING EMPLOYEES.

I served as a steward at Stop and Shop for years before we had no choice but to go on strike in 2019. I say we had no choice because while it was a decision we didn't take lightly, it WAS an easy decision. The company wasn't offering meaningful wage increases, and they were attempting to eliminate insurance coverage for our spouses, gut our pensions and reduce our overtime. We simply had no choice.

I am incredibly proud of my coworkers. We had union members like myself with decades of experience, and we had coworkers who weren't even members yet, because they had been hired only recently. We all stuck together for eleven days, and we won. Three years ago we settled our strike with a fair contract. Last week we secured an even better contract- probably the best in our union's eighty- year history, and I know it was because the company knew what our solidarity looked like, and they knew we would do it again if we had to.

While our brothers and sisters were steadfast in their fight for a good contract, it definitely wasn't an easy eleven days. It was so hard for us all to be able to strike not knowing how they would pay rent, feed their kids, or make the next month's car payment. Our coworkers mostly live paycheck to paycheck. Missing nearly two week's pay put a financial strain on them that took them the rest of 2019 to recover from.

These past two years have shown us how critical so many union members are to our society- nurses, supermarket workers, truck drivers and food processors are some of the most important workers, and without them, our communities fall apart pretty quickly. These years ahead will be crucial for workers to once again gain the security of a union contract and family sustaining wages and benefits. Striking is something taken very seriously and therefore, in situations where members and their union leadership vote for a legally sanctioned strike, they should be able to collect unemployment while the new contract is bargained. It would give employees an extra level of protection and leverage while seeking a fair agreement.

Thank you,

Cheryl Michaud
Oakville, CT